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Wuthering Heights and the influence of literary value

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***Wuthering Heights* and the influence of literary value**

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the way in which responses to *Wuthering Heights* have changed over time due to the influence of changing standards of literary value. Although Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is considered a work of classic literature, it has received a range of both positive and negative responses since it was published in 1847, influenced by the literary standards of realist, gothic and modernist literature. When *Wuthering Heights* was written and published, the popular genre of the time was realist fiction, while the gothic genre had experienced both a rise and decline by the 1920s. *Wuthering Heights* was rejected by the first group of reviewers because it combined elements of both realist and gothic writing.

Reviewers conducted a moral and didactic reading that opposed the gothic behaviour of the characters and rejected the ambiguous aspects of the novel. At the turn of the 20th century, however, the rise of the modernist movement allowed *Wuthering Heights* to be re-examined by critics who read the book through a modernist frame and found aspects of the story to privilege, earning the novel a more positive valuation. These reviewers were interested in finding psychological reasons to explain the behaviour of the characters, and rejected the realist point of view presented by Nelly and Lockwood, the novel's narrators. Based on this analysis, the shifting popularity of literary movements has brought about the initial rejection and later privileging of Brontë's novel. My claim will be supported by analysing the critical responses to *Wuthering Heights* from different time periods that reflect the dominant attitudes to literature and opinions of *Wuthering Heights*. In exploring the responses to *Wuthering Heights*, I aim to show how it is possible for the same text to have a constantly changing value, due to the transformation of standards and trends in literature.

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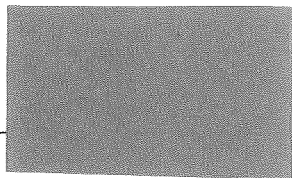
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Introduction

Wuthering Heights has undergone continuous analysis since its publication in 1847, receiving both harsh criticism and vigorous praise from reviewers and literary critics. Changing beliefs about the purpose and value of literature have been the cause of these shifting attitudes towards the novel. My thesis will argue that responses to *Wuthering Heights* have developed from the way in which literary standards and trends have changed and evolved over time. I will argue that the shift from rejection to acceptance of Emily Brontë's novel has resulted from the literary movements of realism, gothicism and modernism. I will argue that these different literary frameworks facilitated different responses to *Wuthering Heights*, and I will demonstrate this by looking at these movements' defining qualities and influence or presence in *Wuthering Heights*. I will then look at the reviews and critical analyses written in response to the novel in each period, to understand what value was given to *Wuthering Heights* at the time. The reviews are important in showing the shift in response as they represent the popular attitudes towards *Wuthering Heights*, and are a valuable source in understanding what elements of *Wuthering Heights* reviewers and critics objected to or approved of.

The changing responses to *Wuthering Heights* as a text also had consequences for the Heathcliff-Catherine couple at the centre of the story. The couple suffered initial rejection from reviewers, who did not like the unconventional nature of the relationship. The obsession, irrationality and excesses of the love story were elements the early reviewers found to be distasteful. These aspects of the romance did not fit within the framework of a rational love story. However, later critics attempted to find explanations for the unconventional romantic relationship. Critics in the 1900s investigated the behaviour of Catherine and Heathcliff and often tried to find motives for why the couple acted in such

an irrational way. Instead of simply rejecting the couple, later critics wanted to explore the thought processes behind the behaviour of the pair.

The first chapter will investigate the conflict between the genres of realism and gothicism. In this chapter, I will look at how the conflict affected the construction of *Wuthering Heights* and the initial reviews made in response to the text. Emily Brontë's writing combined elements of both realist and gothic genres. As well as this, the conflict between gothic and realist writing also formed the framework through which the novel was judged. At the time, the popularity of realist fiction and the unpopularity of gothic fiction caused the initial reviewers of *Wuthering Heights* to reject the story and give negative reviews. The reviewers took issue with the way *Wuthering Heights* had not followed realist writing standards, and criticised the gothic elements that compromised the realism of the novel. Because of this subversion of writing trends, *Wuthering Heights* was seen to be repellent and unacceptable. This response demonstrates that *Wuthering Heights* was compared to and judged against realist writing standards. The time in which *Wuthering Heights* was written and published emphasised reason, truthfulness (Warwick & Willis, 2008, p. 160) and morality (ibid., p. 29) as the most important quality for its stories and characters. Gothic writing was based on subverting realist modes as well as highlighting the limitations of realist writing, which often downplayed the emotional needs and mental processes of characters in favour of a focus on external features and appearances. I will demonstrate how Emily Brontë had been interested in and inspired by the older gothic and romantic works that reviewers saw as outdated and immoral. Though it was an unpopular genre by the time *Wuthering Heights* was published, the influence of the gothic genre is evident throughout *Wuthering Heights* in its plot, characters and themes. However, the novel also had realist influences in the presentation of the Yorkshire landscape, rules of society, a focus on how families

accumulated wealth and the status of women and servants, as well as life on the moors, in apparent isolation from the rest of the world. Through the above, Brontë demonstrated a conflict between realism and gothicism, which was also evident through blurring boundaries between heroes and villains and setting up a conflict between reason and emotion. I will show how the novel fits into a gothic mould because of its obvious rejections of religion, morality and social conventions that were highly regarded at the time.

As will be shown in the following chapters, *Wuthering Heights*' subversion of the popularity of realist writing in 1847 had negative consequences for its reception by early critics. The gothic influences, which subverted popular writing standards, meant that Emily Brontë's novel was criticised and rejected by the vast majority of reviewers. Other early reviewers also attempted to force *Wuthering Heights* into a realist framework, which was unsuccessful because *Wuthering Heights* did not comply with realist writing standards. The novel's gothic qualities tied in with a wider approach to writing that involved exploration and analysis of psychology and abnormality, rather than didacticism and moralising (Botting, 1996, p. 3). However, the unpopularity of this approach meant that reviewers saw *Wuthering Heights* as unsuitable, and were worried about the detrimental effects resulting from readers being exposed to depictions of immoral behaviour. As a result, the focus of the first chapter is concerned with how the initial rejection of *Wuthering Heights* stemmed from its transgression of genre expectations.

In the 1900s, the negative responses to *Wuthering Heights* were ending. As I will argue in the second chapter, the shift was predominantly due to the changing literary scene, in particular the development of the modernist movement. Though very different from the gothic movement in terms of style, modernism contained similar themes and ideas. Most importantly, modernism was also based on a rebellion against the limitations of realist

writing. Like gothic writing, modernists rebelled against characteristics of realist fiction such as omniscient narration, believing that these methods did not adequately encapsulate reality. In contrast, modernists placed an emphasis on internal human processes, through studies of psychology, fragmentation and stream-of-consciousness (Childs, 2007, p. 3). I will argue that *Wuthering Heights* can be read in a way that brings it close to some of the standards of modernist writing. Emily Brontë's approach to psychology and consciousness were constructed in a way that supported modernist beliefs and rejected the realist approach to depicting reality. My second chapter argues that as the modernist movement became more popular, critics who favoured the ideas of modernism re-valued *Wuthering Heights*. Their endorsement of modernism meant that their response to *Wuthering Heights* was based on finding ways to make sense of the story through psychological exploration. In doing this, reviewers attempted to explain the novel's transgressions of typical, normal writing standards. I will show that critics after 1900 were more accepting of the story because of their interest in character's psychology and motivations, and as such offered explanations to try and make sense of the construction of characters, rather than simply reject it for its lack of obedience to popular genre conventions. The modernist movement allowed *Wuthering Heights* to enjoy growing popularity, which helped to elevate the novel to the status of a classic text. In turn, critics viewed the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship as a more acceptable depiction of romantic love, because their behaviour could be understood to represent the chaos of real life, and the product of certain psychologies. Based on this reading, I will argue that *Wuthering Heights* was re-valued due to its modernist qualities and the shift in genre trends.

In making this argument, I am relying on ideas relating to the relationship between art and ideology, and by supporting the idea of the relativity of literary value. As Alick West

argues, “A work of literature... embodies a particular social attitude; in certain social conditions this attitude can be advantageously advanced by certain social classes, and the work is said to have value. When these conditions change, it loses its value” (West, 1996, p. 103-106). Although I am not conducting a Marxist reading by looking at historical context, I am relying on a Marxist foundation to pursue my argument. I agree with West’s claim that value is not inherent, but is instead informed by “social attitudes” – the dominant ideology shared by people. These social attitudes, according to West, determine the value of literature. Terry Eagleton defined the term ‘ideology’ as “the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in.” (1983, p. 14). Therefore, ideology is the group of dominant ideas that shape how people perceive the world, and dictate which beliefs are valued over others. Eagleton argues that literature is a form of perception, and because of this, literature has “a relation to that dominant way of seeing the world” (1976, p. 6). This means that the production of literature is shaped by social attitudes. In turn, responses to literature are also influenced by the dominant social attitudes shared by people, which indicate what ideas are valued.

My thesis demonstrates that *Wuthering Heights* and the reviews in response to it have been shaped by certain social attitudes. As attitudes toward the standards of literary value have changed, the value of texts such as *Wuthering Heights* has in turn experienced a shift. Although because of its subversion of standards of literary value *Wuthering Heights* was initially rejected, its parallels to later standards allowed it to become favourable.

Chapter One: The Gothic Genre and responses to *Wuthering Heights*

This chapter will explore the influence of the gothic genre in *Wuthering Heights*, and the consequences it had on the novel's reception. The chapter will follow the initial rise of gothic fiction with *The Castle of Otranto*, and the following decline, indicated by the trend of parodying gothicism. I will look at how Emily Brontë was influenced by the gothic genre, and how aspects of the genre were present in her novel. Finally, I will explore the consequences of the presence of gothicism in *Wuthering Heights*. I will show how the gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights* caused reviewers to produce a negative response to the novel. Reviewers objected to the novel's subversion of the popularity of realist fiction at the time through the use of gothic elements.

The gothic genre

Developed in the eighteenth and through the nineteenth centuries, Fred Botting describes gothic fiction as "a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing" (Botting, 1996, p. 14). During the 18th and 19th centuries, important changes were beginning to occur around the world that influenced the formation of gothic writing. Countries were shifting towards industrialisation and urbanisation, and scientists were making new and frequent discoveries. There had also been much political unrest with occurrences of abdications in England and revolution in France (Heiland, 2004, p. 3). These changes had consequences for the makeup of domestic life, religion, value systems and gender roles (Botting, 1996, p. 3), and these changes brought about a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty. The massive changes taking place in the structuring of society meant that

ideas of transgression and disintegration were at the forefront of public consciousness (Davison, 2009, p. 47). Gothic literature presented a world in which constant threats, insecurity and uncertainty were a part of everyday existence for its characters (Heiland, 2004, p. 3). Because of this, gothic writing was a literary encapsulation of the negative emotions felt in response to change.

During the production of gothic writing, the popular movement in the writing of novels was realism. The realist genre aimed to put a mirror up to society, writing about people and events that were thought to be true to life. Realism involved descriptions of exterior elements, such as buildings, clothing, objects and settings, to create what was seen as a portrait of real life. Character construction was based on their surroundings, and character behaviour was used to establish a “larger interrogation of human values and motivations” (Warwick & Willis, 2008, p. 160). In doing this, authors investigated morality and set an example of good or bad behaviour to readers through characters. Realism was distinguishable for its didactic role, in which guidelines were set for living and messages were presented to readers concerning proper behaviour (ibid.). The Enlightenment was an ideological influence on the creation of realist fiction, seen as the opportunity for man to “come of age” and encourage the advancement of knowledge (Porter, 2001, p. 1), to try and make sense of the world and deal with issues that they found problematic. The term empiricism described the way knowledge was gained through the senses, resulting in the shaping of ideas. Empiricists tried to objectively study the world, like the writers of realist novels (Porter, 2001, p. 18). In defining this age by its knowledge and civilisation, references to the past were seen to be irrational and ignorant. The importance of reason and rationality was reflected in the writing of realists, and references to the past and depictions of irrational ideas or behaviour were rejected (Botting, 1996, p. 22). Gothic

writers sought to subvert rationality through setting their work in a superstitious medieval period that differed from the realistic, modern world.

As established in Fred Botting's definition, gothic writing had similarities to other genres of the time, but also developed its own unique characteristics. In his article "Gothic versus Romantic: a revaluation of the gothic novel", Robert Hume described gothic and romantic genres as sharing "some themes and characteristics" (1969, p. 288). However, the major difference between the two related to the feelings of uncertainty that gothic writing was produced in. Romantic writing tried to reconcile conflict created in the story through "the creation of a higher order" (Hume, 1969, p. 290). Unlike romanticism, gothic writing usually did not provide explanations or answers for the events it was describing, allowing the story to end without a clear sense of resolution or certainty (ibid.). There were also basic standard images present in gothic writing. These included castles and ruins, storms and unruly landscapes, and a social system based on strong religious ideals or feudalism. Gothicism often referred to the supernatural through events that could not be explained through empiricism (Ellis, 2000, p. 21), as a clear way of "removing the narrative from the realm of the everyday" (Hume, 1969, p. 284). There were also standard gothic characters: a heroine, her lover, and a dangerous older man who threatened to imprison or murder the couple. Most often, these elements were symbolic representations of the themes of discord, uncertainty and anxiety (Sedgwick, 1986, p. 8).

The basis of gothic writing was transgression, including social and sexual transgressions such as incest and adultery (Heiland, 2004, p. 3). Gothic writing frequently described and examined events and ideas that were seen as uncivilised and repulsive, depicting "usurpation, intrigues, betrayal and murder" (Botting, 1996, p. 6) as well as "criminal behaviour, violent executions of selfish ambition... and licentious enactments of carnal

desire” (ibid.). These depictions of immorality transgressed the behaviour that religious institutions expected people to follow. The ambivalent tone of gothic writing was also transgressive, which differed from the certainty and clarity of realist, didactic novels. Botting also asserts that gothic writing was ambivalent in the mixed emotions it worked to evoke in readers: gothic writers aimed to cause terror, but also excitement and intrigue (1996, p. 9).

Unlike realist writing that focused on external elements to construct characters and stories, gothic works tended to emphasise the psychologies of its characters. According to Hume, gothic writing developed out of a growing curiosity in what he described as “psychological interest” (1969, p. 283), and an interest in “interior mental processes” (ibid.). Gothic writing emphasised the thought processes of its characters and their emotions, and in doing this, encouraged a greater understanding of the actions of characters in the story. Instead of didacticism, gothic writers explored varied, sometimes disturbing, psychological perspectives. Gothic novels often contained characters that embodied excessive emotion, acting irrationally due to their unbridled feelings and desires (Hume, 1969, p. 285).

Character construction in gothic texts investigated the way human psychology encouraged transgressive behaviour, involving instances of danger, uncertainty and disintegration. It also emphasised a subversion of standards of society and morality, highly regarded ideals of the 18th and 19th centuries. (Botting, 1996, p. 3). As I will show, these defining gothic qualities are evident in Emily Brontë’s approach to representing the psychology of her characters in *Wuthering Heights*, particularly Heathcliff and Catherine.

For a time, gothic writing did enjoy endorsement in its own right and became a familiar and popular genre, though it continued to be part of a minority (Botting, 1996, p. 21). Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, is considered by most literary critics to be

the introduction of the gothic genre to the literary scene (Ellis, 2000, p. 27). Walpole described his writing as “an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the antient [ancient] and the modern” (cited in Ellis, 2000, p. 20). By mixing elements from medieval romances and realist novels, Walpole wanted to “overcome the perceived limitations of both” (Botting, 1996, p. 48). Walpole wanted to find common ground between a desire for realistic representation, and a genre made up of improbable situations. In doing this, Walpole pushed and subverted the popular tastes and aesthetic standards of the time (ibid.). *The Castle of Otranto* was written under the premise of being a supposed historical document, establishing the gothic trait of creating a story within a story. The preface of the story alleged that it was a translation of “a medieval Italian story printed in 1529 and written at the time of the Crusades” (Botting, 1996, p. 49). The story used antiquated language, gothic script and references to past societal customs to make the reader believe that this story was an authentic tale from the dark ages. (ibid.). Walpole also relied on the setting of the castle, which contained “underground vaults, ill-fitting doors with rusty hinges, easily extinguished lamps and a trap-door” (Birkhead, 1921, p. 33). All these elements were made to appear potentially dangerous and terrifying, but were often later shown to be trivial and harmless (Birkhead, 1921, p. 33).

The Castle of Otranto also showed an interest in character psychology and behaviour. The story contained mysterious, supernatural occurrences, such as a sighing portrait, which encouraged superstitious, irrational and emotional responses from the characters (Botting, 1996, p. 51). The main character, Manfred, who needs to retain his place as prince by producing an heir, decides to pursue and marry his dead son’s fiancée. His ambition, driven by desire and greed, becomes murderous. Manfred’s actions demonstrate his lack of moral boundaries and his irrational thought processes, which eventuates into a tragic mistake. *The*

Castle of Otranto is significant because it describes and explores the psychological outcomes of an unstable, changing environment, which are often negative and illogical (Smith, 2007, p. 18). Walpole's second preface to *Otranto*, written in 1765, made the claim that the story's purpose was to make the characters "think, speak and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions" (Smith, 2007, p. 19). Based on this explanation, Walpole wanted people to read his stories as allegories of "'real' psychological situations and political circumstances" (ibid.). The questionable morality in the story and the inclusion of the supernatural and superstition are elements that were also evident in *Wuthering Heights*, and demonstrated the influence of gothic literature on Emily Brontë's writing.

Franz Potter believes that most critics agreed that gothic writing began to lose reader appeal around 1820 (Potter, 2005, pp. 1-2). Edith Birkhead insightfully pointed out that "the novel of terror has been destroyed not by its enemies but by its too ardent devotees" (Birkhead, 1921, p. 124). After the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* and similar novels such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, writers took part in creating mass-produced gothic tales. These tales relied heavily on simplistic images of ghosts and castles, and aimed to shock and horrify readers easily and as often as possible (Birkhead, 1921, p. 160). At this point, the genre became, to use Birkhead's term, "disreputable" (ibid.), because of those who "looked upon fiction as a lucrative trade, not as an art" (ibid.). Critics grew weary of what they viewed as "an unending torrent of popular trashy novels" (Botting, 1996, p. 21/22), and were unanimous in their rejection of these stories between 1790 and 1810 (ibid.). As a result, the gothic novels were no longer effective in creating the desired response of terror and excitement from readers. In relation to the context of gothic writing, Botting claimed that gothic novels' "capacity to embody and externalise fears and

anxieties was in decline” (Botting, 1996, p. 10). Furthermore, rejections of gothic writing also stemmed from the transgressions and oppositions the gothic genre was defined by, opposing the standards of “cultivation and civilised behaviour” (Botting, 1996, p. 22). Fearing that this writing might cause people to take on immoral and radical behaviour, reviewers rejected the work.

As part of this backlash against gothic writing, the genre was criticised and parodied (Johnson, 1817/2008, p. ix). One of the most famous critiques of gothic fiction was Jane Austen’s novel, *Northanger Abbey*. Charlotte Brontë was critical of Austen’s realist-style novels, describing them as being like “a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden... but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy” (Southam, 1996, p. 126). Charlotte also complained that Austen “ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound” (Southam, 1996, p. 128). Given that Charlotte and Emily had similar writing influences, and had a very close relationship, it is probable that Emily had similar opinions on realist writing. *Northanger Abbey* was published in 1818, though it had been written at the end of the 1700s (Todd, 2006, p. 36). It told the story of a seventeen-year-old girl, Catherine Morland, an avid reader of gothic novels. In reading these books, Catherine develops an overactive imagination, leading her to come to unlikely and dramatic conclusions about the people around her. Catherine “expects the extreme and menacing and finds only the ordinary and innocuous” (Johnson, 1817/2008, p. xi). The plot makes fun of the tension, high drama and horror of the gothic genre. Although novels like *Northanger Abbey* had included some of the light-hearted aspects of gothic fiction, the trend of parody indicated the decline in popularity of gothicism. This decline had major consequences for the way in which reviewers received *Wuthering Heights*, and the initial unpopularity the novel suffered.

Gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights*

Although *Wuthering Heights* had been preceded by both a rise and decline in the gothic genre, there were obvious influences and evidence of gothic elements in the story. This stemmed from the reading habits of Emily Brontë and her attraction to the gothic and romantic genres (Miller, 2002, p. 195). *Wuthering Heights* engaged with some of the basic gothic ideas such as expansive landscapes and dark and stormy weather. Emily Brontë constructed *Wuthering Heights* as a story within a story, considered a gothic convention because of its representation of the “intrusive relationship between past and present” (Sedgwick, 1986, p. 99). The moors, though not explicitly present in *Wuthering Heights*, provided a psychological landscape for the untamed passions of the characters and their yearning for freedom. Catherine tells Nelly of a dream in which she is flung from heaven to “the middle of the heath on top of Wuthering Heights” where she wakes “sobbing for joy” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 81). Many years later, her daughter, also named Catherine, finds the moors to be a source of adventure, asking Nelly when she can “walk to the top of those hills...” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 190). Brontë also constructed the character of Joseph to represent religion and morality, in order to subvert and reject these beliefs. Nelly describes Joseph as “the wearisomest, self-righteous pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises onto himself, and fling the curses on his neighbours” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 42). Joseph’s character is an oppressive force throughout the story, as Catherine, in her childhood, describes him bullying her and Heathcliff, telling them to “think uh yer sows!” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 21). His construction as an oppressor because of his religious dedication is a subversion of the highly regarded place of morality at the time.

Though references to the supernatural were limited, there were scenes in which supernatural forces, or belief in the supernatural, were present. A particularly terrifying

scene in the novel involves Catherine's ghost haunting the narrator, Lockwood. In retaliation, Lockwood "pulled its wrist onto the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 25), a violent, cruel response to his irrational fear. The superstitious belief in ghosts is mentioned again at the end of the story as Nelly tells Lockwood that the figures of "Heathcliff and a woman" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 336) have been seen by a local boy. This account lets the reader know that although Heathcliff and Catherine are now both dead, they still haunt the memories, both literally and figuratively, of those remaining. It also ties in with the gothic tendency toward irrationality that allows a belief in the supernatural.

There are suggestions that the basis of Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship at the centre of the story is an incestuous bond, a sexual and moral transgression popular in gothic writing. Heathcliff's mysterious introduction into the Earnshaw home, and his and Catherine's childhood together as brother and sister, has caused some literary critics, like Eric Solomon, to deduce that they cannot engage in a proper, normal relationship because they are blood relatives (Solomon, 1959, p. 83). However, the novel refrains from including a moral judgement on this aspect of the novel, which diminishes the didactic nature of the story.

The presence of ambiguity affects all the main characters of *Wuthering Heights*. Although on the surface Emily Brontë is using gothic conventions to construct her characters, she complicates them and gives them more complexity by making their role ambiguous, another gothic convention. Donna Heiland points out that *Wuthering Heights* follows a gothic plot by placing the heroine, Catherine, between "a morally dubious figure" (Heiland, 2004, p. 117), Heathcliff, and "the physically fair, morally good figure of Edgar" (Heiland, 2004, p. 118). In spite of the three characters fitting these roles, Catherine is not

“threatened by one man and saved by the other” (ibid.) as most gothic heroines are. Edgar and Heathcliff each contain good and evil traits. Edgar Linton can be seen as the “good” man of the pair, who is described as having a “soft-featured face” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 67) and being “almost too graceful” (ibid.). Edgar represents wealth and status, and Catherine believes that marrying him will make her “the greatest woman of the neighbourhood” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 78). However, Edgar is not entirely good. He is prejudiced against Heathcliff throughout the novel because of his low status, rudely exclaiming that Heathcliff’s hair is “like a colt’s mane over his eyes!” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 59), and upon Heathcliff’s return, calling him “the gipsy – the plough-boy” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 95). Heathcliff also accuses Edgar of making Catherine “cruel and false” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 162), and that Catherine’s “poor fancy” for Linton was the cause of their separation (ibid.). As will be discussed later, Heathcliff is predominantly seen as the evil character, being bitter, angry, violent and vengeful. However, these traits can be argued to stem from his ability to feel pain and hurt, and that Heathcliff is not without positive emotions. Only when Catherine betrays her own heart (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 162) does Heathcliff lose his potential for love. This construction of the two male leads subverts what would normally have been very clear boundaries between characters. The construction of Edgar and Heathcliff ties in with the gothic method of exploring complex psychology. Emily Brontë’s exploration into the psychologies of Edgar and Heathcliff is used to explain their behaviour, as well as illustrating that their complex thoughts and actions cannot be explained solely by their outward appearances. This demonstrated to readers that external qualities were inadequate in dictating the goodness or evil of a character.

Brontë’s greatest innovation, which was problematic for critics, is her construction of Heathcliff, the villain-hero of the story. This villain-hero character “combines the roles of

gothic villain and Romantic outcast in his antisocial demeanour, fierce temper, mercenary and unlawful plottings, and his quest for vengeance” (Botting, 1996, p. 129). Heathcliff contains all these qualities. He does not live peacefully alongside any of the other characters in the story, causing harm and disruption wherever he goes. Heathcliff’s character was also an embodiment of the irrational, primitive emotions that opposed Enlightenment and ideals of rationality and reason. He has a tendency for violence, at one point brutalising his wife Isabella, when Brontë describes how Heathcliff “snatched a dinner knife from the table, and flung it” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 182-3) at his wife. There are frequent references to Heathcliff cursing, and his “prayer” to Catherine after her death is disturbing, crying, “may you not rest as long as I am living... Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad!” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 169). Most famously, Heathcliff has an overwhelming desire to “pay Hindley back” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 61) which motivates his return to Wuthering Heights, telling Catherine that he will not “suffer unrevenged” after she reacts negatively to his advances on Isabella. (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 112). This desire for revenge is a major motive for Heathcliff’s actions and drives much of the story’s plot. These qualities allow Heathcliff to be seen as a villain by the characters within the story and the critics who reviewed it.

Heathcliff’s character, as a subversion of a typical villain, was made distinctive by Emily Brontë’s approach to humanising him through his emotions and thought processes. For all his negative qualities and questionable actions, he is driven by feelings of pain, suffering, and love. Heathcliff acts violently towards Hindley, as Isabella described how Heathcliff “kicked and trampled... and dashed” Hindley’s head repeatedly (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 179). This violence is usually in response to the oppression Heathcliff has suffered, and the servant status Hindley has forced him in. His anger towards the Lintons derives from his

realisation that their lifestyle and their friendship with Catherine are causing her to change and become less interested in him. His plans of revenge stem predominantly from his love for Catherine, telling her that his plan to return and seek revenge is “just to have one glimpse” of her again (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 97). Catherine’s behaviour toward Heathcliff makes his behaviour reactionary. Her loving welcome to the returning Heathcliff makes him forget his plans of suicide (ibid.), but her refusal to leave Edgar causes Heathcliff to pursue Isabella. On one level, Heathcliff acts as a typical gothic villain, but in exploring the reasons and motivations for his villainy, Emily Brontë makes his character more ambiguous. Joyce Carol Oates argues that Heathcliff is “defiantly not a hero” (Oates, 1982, p. 443), and that he is disdainful when Isabella views him as a “hero of romance” (ibid.). This argument shows that the reader should not see Heathcliff as simply a hero or villain. As will be seen in the early reviews of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff’s complex character and the humanisation given to him by Brontë made it difficult for critics to apply a realist reading around him and the story as a whole. The importance of morality to reviewers, and the expectation of a moral lesson within the story, meant that they struggled to accept the gothic ambivalence of *Wuthering Heights*. By presenting Heathcliff in this complex and humanised way, Emily Brontë was examining his psychology, rather than presenting him as a representative of good or bad behaviour, as didactic novels often did.

Wuthering Heights also fits into the gothic framework by setting up a tension between the outside world and the inner natures of Catherine and Heathcliff. The repressive, rational nature of the world and the intense, uncontrollable feelings of the couple represent the tension between the realist and gothic elements of the novel. The role of Nelly as narrator makes her a representative of rationality, viewing Catherine and Heathcliff as emotional, disordered and unnatural. Nelly has strong religious and moral standards that she often

makes clear to the couple, telling Catherine that she wishes she would speak rationally and that she does not understand Catherine's indecision and excessive emotions (Brontë, 1847/1995, pp. 79-80), demonstrating the gap between Nelly's rationality and the irrationality of Catherine and Heathcliff.

Catherine and Heathcliff enforce gothic irrationality through their actions, which are impulsive and driven solely by emotion, something seen frequently through the dialogue between the characters. Upon learning that Heathcliff is making romantic advances toward Isabella Linton, Catherine tells him to leave Isabella alone, unless he is "tired of being received here, and wish Linton to draw the bolts" against him (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 111). In response, Heathcliff tells her that she has treated him "infernally", and says, "if you think I can be consoled by sweet words you are an idiot" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 112).

Often, the impulsive decisions of the two characters for example, Catherine's agreement to accept Edgar's proposal, and Heathcliff's decision to leave after discovering this lead to the tragedy and destruction created in the story. Their actions cause their separation, which drives them to inflict misery on those around them and on each other. This obsessive, destructive relationship is viewed by the other characters, particularly Nelly, as difficult to understand and impossible to relate to. She watches the dramatic final meeting between the pair "in great perplexity" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 162). To Catherine and Heathcliff, rationality, reason and domesticity repress their true natures, causing their value systems to become skewed and leading them to make decisions that have negative consequences for both of them. As a result, Brontë's exploration of social norms and conventional morality expose their potential to be seen as negative influences on behaviour, and not always harmonious or constructive.

As Edith Birkhead described in her book of 1921, *The Tale of Terror*, instead of simply using standard gothic tactics to increase the tension of *Wuthering Heights*, the story exposes and explores “the terrors of actual life” (Birkhead, 1921, p. 190). To Birkhead, the terrors of actual life result from combining gothic and realist writing, thus showing how terror can exist in reality. This approach of combining gothic and realist writing also brings out the ambivalence of *Wuthering Heights*, another gothic element. Emily Brontë does very little to enforce a moral framework that the characters must follow or subvert. Her characters display a variety of irrational behaviours and transgressive psychological outlooks, which Brontë does not always show as questionable or abhorrent. Nelly, as narrator, represents the rational, reasonable viewpoint through which the behaviour of certain characters, particularly that of Catherine and Heathcliff, seem objectionable. However, Brontë chooses not to simply reject the characters, and instead attempts to account for their behaviour, and gives them attributes that humanise them and give them complexity. By creating ambivalence, the story declines to send a moral message to readers, subverting the didactic nature of many realist novels of the time. *Wuthering Heights* relies on gothic elements such as ambivalence to avoid directing reader responses, and in doing this, Brontë’s novel to some extent rejects the standards of realist writing.

Critical Rejections of the Gothic in *Wuthering Heights*

The reviews of *Wuthering Heights* at the time of publication reflected the expectations reviewers had concerning genre and the role of the writer. Early reviews highlighted the fact that reviewers saw the gothic influences in *Wuthering Heights* as a cause for criticism. Many early reviews also attempted to force *Wuthering Heights* into a realist frame. Because of

these approaches by reviewers, *Wuthering Heights* was largely rejected because of its gothic elements and its undermining of realist writing methods.

One of the first reviews of *Wuthering Heights* was published in the *Spectator* in December 1847. It claimed that *Wuthering Heights* was an unsuccessful work because “the incidents are too coarse and disagreeable to be attractive...” (*Spectator*, 1847/1970, p. 39) These “incidents” are the gothic elements of the story, which subverted the refinement and reason of realist novels and the realist potential of *Wuthering Heights*. The idea of the reader as refined, and someone who would “disagree” with the gothic elements of the novel, reveals the perceived unfavourableness of the story’s morals, and demonstrated the reviewer’s attempt to apply a didactic reading to *Wuthering Heights*. The reviewer also examined the characters, claiming that the villainy in the story cannot be justified by “the elaborate pains taken in depicting it” (ibid.). This comment implies that the gothic approach, to examine the human condition and psychology without necessarily referring to social codes or morality, was incorrect and did not fit in with realist modes. This approach to writing, which opposed standard realism, became a cause for concern to critics (Miller, 2001, p. 193). The realist and moral standards required *Wuthering Heights* to depict morally worthy characters in relatable, reasonable situations, rather than the highly emotional characters of *Wuthering Heights* caught in extraordinary circumstances.

The next review, from the *Athenaeum* in the same month and year, had very similar complaints to the *Spectator* review. The reviewer struggled to endorse the novel “in spite of much power and cleverness; in spite of its truth to life...” (*Athenaeum*, 1847/1970, p. 39) because of the reviewer’s claim that *Wuthering Heights* was “a disagreeable story” (ibid.).

Although *Wuthering Heights* adhered to some of the realist and moral expectations, especially in its portrayal of “remote nooks and corners of England” (ibid.), the story’s transgressions

could not be overlooked. The main gothic influence the *Athenaeum* reviewer objected to was the construction of Heathcliff. The reviewer attempted to reconcile Heathcliff's character with being based on real life people "where human beings, like the trees, grow gnarled and dwarfed and distorted..." (ibid.) Despite this, the reviewer complained that Heathcliff's gothic character was given too prominent a place in *Wuthering Heights*, to the extent that "there is hardly a scene untainted by his presence" (ibid.). This demonstrated the reviewer's objection to Heathcliff's dual role as a hero and a villain, and the time spent on psychologically exploring this morally questionable figure.

This preoccupation with Heathcliff continued into the next year of reviews. A reviewer for *The Examiner* in 1848 could not make sense of *Wuthering Heights*, calling the story "wild, confused, disjointed and improbable" (*Examiner*, 1848/1974, p. 220) for the mix of genres it presented. The lack of realism and believability in the story made it subversive and difficult for the reviewer to endorse. The reviewer's main problem with *Wuthering Heights* again lay with the characters, whom he called "savages" (ibid.), struggling with the emotional excesses and lack of moral guidelines present in the novel. However, the reviewer's issue with characters rested mainly with Heathcliff. The reviewer rejected Heathcliff's conflicting states of hatred and love, writing:

The hardness, selfishness and cruelty of Heathcliff are in our opinion inconsistent with the romantic love that he is stated to have felt for Catherine Earnshaw... He has no gratitude, no affection, no liking for anything human except for one person, and that liking is thoroughly selfish and ferocious. (*Examiner*, 1848/1974, p. 221)

Again, Heathcliff's character, borrowing from both gothic and romantic genres with his excessive emotion and violence, did not fall easily into a single category. His gothic tendencies to violence and hatred, and lack of positive emotions did not coincide with the expected qualities of a hero. As a result of this, the reviewer could not approve of his behaviour.

In 1848, a reviewer in Douglas Jerrold's *Weekly Newspaper* was also preoccupied with the "brutal cruelty and semi-savage love" (*Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, 1848/1970, p. 44) present in *Wuthering Heights*. Attempting to look at the novel from a realist perspective, the reviewer concluded that it was difficult to deduce a moral message, and that the reviewer had only seen "mere glimpses of hidden morals and secondary meanings" (ibid.). The reviewer attempted to account for the complexities of good and evil in the story by stating:

The reader is shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity and the most diabolical hate and vengeance, and anon come passages of powerful testimony to the supreme power of love – even over demons in the human form. (ibid.)

This reading, though not as negative as other reviews of the time, was still attempting to apply realist standards to *Wuthering Heights* by seeking out the didactic framework of the story and the presence of moral messages. Although the review emphasises the positive element of the love story to try and balance the negative elements, the reviewer is still distracted by the immoral behaviour overall, believing it was these elements on which the reader based their response.

An article in the *Britannia* in the same year agreed that Emily Brontë's depiction of tragic love sent a message to readers about "the brutalizing influence of unchecked passion"

(*Britannia*, 1848/1974, p. 225). This attempt to find the didactic elements of the story caused reviewers to be unappreciative of *Wuthering Heights* as an exploration of human psychology, and to force it into a realist and didactic framework. As such, the novel's content did not adhere to a realist standard for the reviewer. This is particularly evident in the reviewer's response to the characters, who consistently complained that *Wuthering Heights* would have been a far better romance if Heathcliff alone had been a being of stormy passions, instead of all the other characters being nearly as violent and destructive as himself" (*Britannia*, 1848/1974, p. 224). This opinion rejects the gothic excess of emotion in the novel and is not in favour of the lack of moral messages presented. Because the reviewers expected the novel to fit in with realist standards, which it did not, they rejected the novel.

The negative reviews of *Wuthering Heights* continued with an article in the *Atlas*, again in 1848. The article opens with the claim that the gothic atmosphere found in *Wuthering Heights* "casts a gloom over the mind" (*Atlas*, 1848/1974, p. 231). The reviewer disliked the negative emotions and the darker side of human nature that the gothic influences brought out. This reviewer is also concerned with the construction of the characters. The characters are criticised for representing "the worst forms of humanity" (ibid.). Just as the reviewer complained about the dark atmosphere of the story overall, they also despised the nature of the characters, writing that not one of them was likeable. The reviewer describes them as deformed, suggesting that their lack of adherence with the reviewer's standards meant there was something wrong and abnormal about them. The reviewer also rejected the love story between Heathcliff and Catherine as an attempt to humanise Heathcliff and earn him sympathy. Because the reviewer felt that Heathcliff's gothic nature could not be justified, the love story failed "of the intended effect" (*Atlas*, 1848/1974, p. 232). The reviewer was

also critical of Catherine, claiming that her gothic nature, driven by excessive emotion, was “wayward” and “pitiful” (ibid.). Up to 1850, reviews of *Wuthering Heights* remained continually negative. These responses caused Charlotte Brontë to feel the need to defend her now-dead sister’s work.

In 1850, Charlotte Brontë republished *Wuthering Heights*. This republication included a Biographical Notice, that revealed that the Bell authors were female, as well as an Editor’s Preface, both written by Charlotte. Charlotte presented *Wuthering Heights* as an unappreciated masterpiece that had suffered unfair criticism, writing, “The immature but very real powers revealed were scarcely recognised; its import and nature were misunderstood...” (Brontë, 1850/1995, p. xlv). Her main goal was to discredit the first group of reviewers, who had rejected the novel, and encourage readers to re-examine *Wuthering Heights* in a positive light. In spite of her aims, Charlotte Brontë’s analysis of *Wuthering Heights* revealed her own reservations about the story. She agreed that the story was “in a great measure unintelligible, and – where intelligible – repulsive” (Brontë, 1850/1970, p. 63), implying that she too saw the novel to be full of literary transgressions, making the book unlikeable. Nonetheless, Charlotte attempted to highlight the less transgressive and more realist aspects of the novel to justify its worth. She shifted attention away from Heathcliff and Catherine and focused on Nelly Dean and Edgar Linton to argue that there were acceptable presentations of morality in the story. However, when she did acknowledge Heathcliff and Catherine, their gothic construction was rejected. She found Catherine’s emotions to be “perverted” (Brontë, 1850/1970, p. 66) and Heathcliff’s love “fierce and inhuman” (ibid.). As a result, Charlotte Brontë agreed with the critics she tried to oppose, and continued a rejection of the gothic elements of *Wuthering Heights*. Although

she believed her opinion offered a “clear glimpse” (Brontë, 1850/1995, p. 1) of the novel, essentially she had the same values concerning morality and genre as other reviewers.

After Charlotte Brontë’s republication, reviewers attempted to give a more detailed analysis of *Wuthering Heights*. Some reviewers continued to emphasise and reject the gothic elements of the story, while others avoided discussing these elements, and began to romanticise and sentimentalise Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship. Both varieties of reviews, however, continued to adhere to realist guidelines and remained wary and unfavourable towards the perceived gothic influences of the novel.

In his 1850 article, G.H. Lewes was critical of Charlotte Brontë’s attempt to discredit reviewers, especially as her review had itself contained similar criticisms of the novel. He admitted that often *Wuthering Heights* was repulsive, and the characters of the story were “bred up amidst violence, revolt, and moral apathy” (Lewes, 1850/1974, p. 292). This comment demonstrated the expectation that *Wuthering Heights* would adhere to popular didactic and moral ideals, and an attempt by Lewes to find the presence of a moral message in the novel. Because of this expectation, Lewes’ reading of *Wuthering Heights* was made up of a rejection of the gothic elements, claiming, “the visions of madmen are not more savage, or more remote from ordinary life” (ibid.). In spite of this analysis, Lewes looked more closely at the development of characters to argue that Catherine and Heathcliff are simply products of their unfortunate upbringing, arguing “such brutes we should all be... were our lives as insubordinate to law, were our affections and sympathies as little cultivated” (ibid.). Although Lewes took a different approach to the review by looking for an explanation for the gothic elements, he also applied a realist, didactic reading to the story. Lewes created a moral message out of the construction of Emily Brontë’s characters in order to make sense of the story.

In that same year, Sidney Dobell was also conflicted in his reading of *Wuthering Heights*, trying to find aspects within the novel to endorse while at the same time showing trepidation about the gothic influences. Dobell attempted to look for positive aspects within the story, pointing to the construction of Catherine's character, describing her as "fearfully natural" (Dobell, 1850/1970, p. 60) and calling her love for both Heathcliff and Edgar an "involuntary art" (ibid.). Dobell apparently believes that Catherine's character could be considered real because she behaves in response to natural, involuntary feelings. However, further comments suggest that Dobell still found the gothic elements of the story to be problematic. These issues predominantly lay with the construction of Heathcliff, who continued to be an obstacle to the reviewers' endorsement of *Wuthering Heights*. Dobell commented that he hoped the questionable elements of the novel were due to it being Emily Brontë's first effort, and that next time "she will not, again, employ her wonderful pencil on a picture so destitute of moral beauty and human worth" (Dobell, 1850/1970, p. 61). This response to the very gothic characteristics of *Wuthering Heights* show that it was consistently difficult for reviewers to analyse *Wuthering Heights* without applying a realist and rational framework to it.

Also in 1851, the *Eclectic Review* opened with the claim that *Wuthering Heights* was one of the "most repellent books we ever read" (*Eclectic review*, 1851/1970, p. 70). The review tried to find aspects of *Wuthering Heights* that they found agreeable, which was limited to favouring the descriptions of scenery. Once again, the reviewer struggled to find positive comments to make when examining the characters. Unlike Lewes who was fascinated by Heathcliff, this reviewer called Heathcliff "a perfect monster" (ibid.), and that both Catherine's "are equally exaggerations... and absurdly unnatural in the leading incidents of their life" (ibid.). These character descriptions again show that the novel's portrayal of excessive emotion

and violence could not be justified by the reviewers. Because of this, the plot was seen to be “devoid of truthfulness” (ibid.), demonstrating that realism continued to be an expectation placed on writers and writing. This review made clear that *Wuthering Heights* was still not favoured, and that the gothic elements continued to cause rejection of the story.

The remaining group of reviewers were more open to the presence of gothic ideals in the events and characters of *Wuthering Heights*, agreeing that it gave the story complexity.

However, in spite of this openness, reviewers were still wary of the influence of gothic writing. John Skelton, writing in 1857, represented a changing attitude to Heathcliff that took into account his negative and positive qualities. Although Skelton calls Heathcliff “ferocious, vindictive, wolfish” (Skelton, 1857/1970, p. 73), he also argues that “we understand the chain of fire that binds Cathy to him” (ibid.) and that in comparison to Edgar, he is more appealing. This analysis of Heathcliff suggests that Heathcliff’s gothic qualities earn him a uniqueness of character and attractiveness to the reader. This also appears to be the case with Catherine, whom Skelton believed echoed “Shakespearian madness” (1857/1970, p. 74) where other reviewers saw an excessive, subversive heroine. Skelton ends his article with the comment that Emily Brontë “may describe abnormal characters, but, whatever they are, she describes them with startling genuineness” (ibid.). This final analysis demonstrates that while Skelton is wary of the content of *Wuthering Heights*, he appreciates Emily Brontë’s powerful writing.

Emile Montegut, also writing in 1857, had similar views on *Wuthering Heights* as John Skelton. Montegut recognised the mix of fascination and passion created in the reader by the gothic features of the novel. He argues that although the characters are guilty of perversities, creating fear in the reader “because the terror which they inspire is above all a moral one” (Montegut, 1857/1970, p. 79) with their “ferocious passions and impulses”

(ibid.). Like previous reviewers, Montegut attempted to explore the didactic nature of the novel. He believed that the perversities Emily Brontë described in *Wuthering Heights* “are avowable, because they are of the kind which we all carry within us” (ibid.). He also argues that the reader is drawn to the characters as Brontë “defies us not to admire them” (ibid.). Montegut highlighted Heathcliff and Catherine, calling them “the story of an irresistible and perverse passion” (Montegut, 1857/1974, p. 377), showing his intrigue with the moral complexities and questionable nature of the story. He attempted to understand how the characters were a result of Emily Brontë’s approach to psychological exploration. However, he still looked at the story in terms of morality and immorality, and wanted to find the message for readers.

In the same year, W.C. Roscoe also showed reservation towards endorsing *Wuthering Heights*. Roscoe continued the trend of reviewers by acknowledging and investigating the presence of gothic elements in the novel, and showing concern for their inclusion. Roscoe felt horror at the presence of gothic excess and violence. He described the novel as containing “frightful excesses of degrading vices, snarling hypocrisy, an almost idiotic imbecility of mind and body, combined with a cruel and utterly selfish nature” (Roscoe, 1857/1970, p. 75). He argued that the inclusion of these elements in the story made it impossible not to “excite abhorrence” in the reader (ibid.). However, Roscoe believed that it was possible to admire *Wuthering Heights*, though “not without horror” (Roscoe, 1857/1970, p. 76). This demonstrates that Roscoe believed that horror was an unavoidable response to reading *Wuthering Heights*. He agreed with Charlotte Brontë that Emily’s characters are inexplicable and worrisome, and must have been produced with naïveté (ibid.). Therefore, in a similar way to the critics previously mentioned, Roscoe showed a conflicting attitude to *Wuthering Heights*, still horrified and concerned with the gothic

elements in the novel, but willing to acknowledge its power and positive elements. Roscoe was impressed with the imagination that went into the creation of the characters of the novel, but complained that they are created “within a very narrow range” (ibid.). This comment suggests that Roscoe did not approve of the excess and drama of the characters. Roscoe attempted to read the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship in a didactic fashion, arguing that the Heathcliff-Catherine couple showed “how fierce, how inhuman a passion, personal attachment to another may become” (Roscoe, 1970, p. 77). This final comment again reveals the persistence of reviewers to look for a clear message of morality in the novel.

After the 1850's, analysis of *Wuthering Heights* declined as the novel remained outside of the literary mainstream, while Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* remained popular (Miller, 2001, p. 201). Lucasta Miller claims that Charlotte Brontë's attempt to defend *Wuthering Heights* contributed to the idea that the novel was an “unacknowledged masterpiece” (ibid.) as well as “its failure to find an appreciative audience” (ibid.). This idea was perpetuated further by the decline in interest from reviewers. Some of the remaining reviews of the 1800s echoed the conflict of opinions expressed by Charlotte Brontë. Like Charlotte, they wanted to put *Wuthering Heights* in a more positive light, but continued to struggle as they attempted to explain or justify the gothic aspects of the novel.

Although the 1873 *Galaxy* review claimed the negative aspects of *Wuthering Heights* had “procured for it so decided a prejudice that it has been only once or twice candidly criticised and fairly judged...” (*Galaxy*, 1873/1970, p. 85), the *Galaxy* itself criticised the novel. The reviewer believed that the faults of *Wuthering Heights* “are too prominent to admit of either glozing or concealment” (ibid.). Like other reviews, many of the complaints from the *Galaxy* were critical of the construction of characters. Heathcliff was described by

the reviewer as “warped by adverse circumstances” (ibid.) and Catherine was seen to be “fierce faithless and foolish” (ibid.). The reviewer believed *Wuthering Heights* demonstrated Emily Brontë’s “power of making the unreal vividly real to the reader” (*Galaxy*, 1873/1970, p. 85-86), showing that the reviewer still expected the novel to follow realist standards. Because of this response, the reviewer expressed yet another rejection of *Wuthering Heights*.

In 1877, T. Wemyss Reid again echoed the structure of Charlotte Brontë’s argument, labelling *Wuthering Heights* a powerful story, but agreeing that “as a novel it is repulsive and almost ghastly” (Reid, 1877/1970, p. 87). Reid, like Charlotte, presented Emily Brontë’s life as inexperienced and isolated. Because of this, Reid sees *Wuthering Heights* as a “juvenile work” (ibid.). This stems from his belief that Emily Brontë was in “absolute ignorance” (ibid.) concerning “the great movements of human nature” (ibid.). He describes Heathcliff as “the greatest villain in fiction” (Reid, 1877/1970, p. 88). However, Reid relies on the human elements of Heathcliff’s character to argue that the reader accepts him “as a real being, not a merely grotesque monster” (ibid.). Reid even makes comparison with the very gothic works of Ann Radcliffe, saying that Heathcliff’s haunting by Catherine’s ghost is truly more terrifying than Radcliffe’s “paraphernalia of rococo horrors” (ibid.). This analysis shows that Reid still did not fully endorse *Wuthering Heights*, but his identification of realist elements, and comparison to other gothic novels, made *Wuthering Heights* much more tolerable.

The shift in response shown in Reid’s article demonstrates that reviewers were gradually beginning to notice the mix of genres Emily Brontë was working with. However, Emily Brontë’s failure to comply with dominant literary tastes of the time meant that it did not receive favourable reviews and was given a low value at the time of its publication. Because of the subversion of realism, and the incorporation of gothic features, *Wuthering Heights* was

rejected by reviewers. Only until literary trends changed could *Wuthering Heights* undergo a revaluation.

Chapter Two: Modernism framing of *Wuthering Heights*

In this chapter, I will show how the opinion of reviewers towards *Wuthering Heights* was changed by the rise of the modernist movement. I will establish the defining ideas of the modernist movement, including the major changes in thought at the time and the techniques used by modernist writers to present their principles. The chapter will then demonstrate how *Wuthering Heights* was able to fit into a modernist framework, and which aspects of the story were privileged during the modernist period. I will then show how reading *Wuthering Heights* through a modernist framework enabled reviewers to revalue the novel and give it a more positive response, by exploring the psychology of the novel's characters. This chapter shows how the shift in literary trends allowed *Wuthering Heights* to experience a change in value.

The modernist genre

The modernist movement took shape in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Just as realist fiction had set up the 19th century world as a time of rationality and civilisation in relation to a barbaric past, modernists viewed their world as chaotic, in comparison to the reason and calm of previous times (Childs, 2008, p. 17). For modernists, realist writing was inadequate in representing the new realities faced as a result of modernity (Lewis, 2007, p. 2). The goal of modernists was to “modify if not overturn existing modes and subjects of representation” (Childs, 2008, p. 4) in order to create new work. In doing this, modernists wanted to reflect the world as they saw it, and create work that was more real and authentic than popular realist writing. Modernist writing was comprised of experimentation with new writing techniques, as well as new themes and focuses that had not been previously

explored (Lewis, 2007, p. 3). The modernist movement in writing predominantly involved an interest in the human mind, consciousness and individual perceptions of reality, in order to show the world as chaotic and unclear (Childs, 2008, p. 3).

The historical context of the modernist movement was made up of a series of new ideas in transforming societies (Lewis, 2007, p. 11). The most powerful historical event that shaped the modernist movement was the First World War. Just as industrialisation and urbanisation had caused disruption and anxiety, reflected in gothic work, the war caused uncertainty and disillusionment amongst people (Childs, 2008, p. 21). Meanwhile, the rise of technology, decline of religion and morality, and the growth of new ways of looking at the world added to an atmosphere of chaos. Modernist writers sought to encapsulate these feelings and respond to the instabilities created by modernity. This focus on emotion and chaos were modernist elements found in *Wuthering Heights*.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche offered new ways of thinking, overturning well-established, popular belief systems. Marxism was based on “an alienation from capitalism” (Childs, 2008, p. 65), and the isolation that was felt in response to the shift “from country to city, land to factory, individual to mass production” (Childs, 2008, p. 39). The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche expressed disillusionment with modernity, which suppressed the “creative, aesthetic, Dionysian spirit” (Childs, 2008, p. 65), causing people to lose touch with their emotions. Nietzsche’s claim that “God is dead” signified “the loss of faith in the divine” (Sedgwick, 2009, p. 106) that occurs when “God has ceased to have explanatory value due to the achievements of modern science” (ibid.). This meant that the knowledge of man determined life, instead of a divine figure, again emphasising the power of consciousness. Modernist writing reflected the growing focus on the individual and the effects of change on their thought processes.

Similarly, the work of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud represented the growing interest in human behaviour and the mind, rejecting religious-based understandings of humans. Darwin's findings on evolution argued that humans were constantly evolving and progressing, rejecting the approach to human existence based on religion, which was founded on the belief of a divine creator (Childs, 2008, p. 47). It implied that "humans were not so easily distinguished from other animals as the eighteenth century proponents of the Enlightenment had assumed" (Lewis, 2007, p. 19). Freud's discovery of the unconscious gave support to the idea that people were not always aware of the motivations for their actions, and that their behaviour could be driven by repressed desires (Childs, 2008, p. 60). Human beings felt isolated not only from their environments, but also from themselves, as their consciousness acted as a barrier to realising the truth behind their desires (Levenson, 1999, p. 9). According to Peter Childs, because "so many writers and thinkers were keen to explore their own and their characters' psychological recesses" (2008, p. 61), modernist literature shared important qualities with psychoanalysis.

Modernists were finding that realist methods were insufficient in encapsulating the harsh reality of life after the First World War, especially after the discoveries and claims put forward by Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche and Freud. Although the modernist movement acknowledged the events that created chaos and disorder, they were more concerned with the effect they had on the human mind. Realist writing had often ignored or rejected the importance of human responses and individual perspectives. Modernist writing explored human behaviour and psychology, looking at how uncertainty and a changing world had consequences on individuals.

Virginia Woolf and James Joyce used a series of techniques to convey modernist ideas to readers. Woolf and Joyce are known as "high modernists", a distinctive writing mode of

the modernist period (Whitworth, 2007, p. 274). High modernism contained the ideal that writers had a desire for total insight, trying to fully encapsulate the experience of life from within the mind. However, high modernists understood that this aim was impossible, because writing could not achieve a true representation of reality (Lewis, 2007, p. 120). High modernism was defined by the belief that because humans were not able to achieve a complete understanding of the world, knowledge was fragmentary (ibid.). The way in which Woolf and Joyce approached their writing style and form represented their thematic concerns. Modernists based their writing on individual perception, using techniques that included changing perspectives and narration, and interior monologues which conveyed this idea to readers.

For Woolf, Edwardian novelists were disappointing because they did not encapsulate what she felt to be an account of true life. Their idea of reality was inauthentic to her. She wanted novelists to move away from an obsession with external material details, believing that this approach to writing did not adequately encapsulate the experience of life (Goldman, 2006, p.104). Woolf's use of the interior monologue showed her preoccupation with the human mind and its perception of the world. The interior monologue highlighted the importance of the thoughts of characters, and their individual psychologies (Childs, 2008, p. 171). This style of writing was more realist because it was more than "a narration of mere facts" (Roe & Sellers, 2000, p. 50). The shift from external to internal focus meant that individual psychology was more realist because it showed life "as it is experienced" (ibid.). The inclusion of multiple characters' consciousness also emphasised the idea of the mind operating individually in each person (Childs, 2008, p. 171). The world presented by modernists, therefore, was more real because it was based on the perception of the individual characters that exist in it.

Like many modernists, Joyce heavily focused on the meaning and importance of the individual, rather than society. This was a rejection of realist writing, because modernist writers felt that third person and omniscient narration gave a misleading impression of objectivity (Childs, 2008, p. 42). More relevant to Joyce as a modernist was individual consciousness. This was particularly evident in Joyce's use of stream of consciousness, a technique he made famous. The idea of a stream of consciousness derived from William James' understanding that "the mind proceeds like a river or stream" (Childs, 2008, p. 170) and that thought is fluid, associative, and unstructured (ibid.). This technique again shows a concern with individual consciousness by emphasising the importance of perception in order to give an account of reality, as well as establishing the fragmented nature of consciousness.

The ideas that were highly regarded by modernists, including exploration of consciousness and psychology, chaos and disorders, and the subversion of realist writing, were elements evident in *Wuthering Heights*. I will show the way reviewers in this period recognised these elements and focused on them in their critical responses. First, however, I will provide a reading of *Wuthering Heights* that demonstrates these features in the novel.

Modernist elements in *Wuthering Heights*

Although *Wuthering Heights* did not contain the linguistic or stylistic trademarks of modernist writing, elements emerged from the novel that had previously been overlooked without the framework of modernism. The modernist interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* was able to invalidate the importance and reliability of the characters of Nelly and Lockwood as rational, reasonable narrators. It also enabled the psychologies of the

protagonists of the story, specifically Heathcliff and Catherine, to be irrational and abnormal without the previously assumed moral frame. This encouraged a reading of *Wuthering Heights* based on finding explanations for the characters' behaviour.

Critics have seen Nelly and Lockwood's roles as narrators in the story as offsetting the irrational, abnormal behaviour of the Heathcliff-Catherine couple. However, Nelly and Lockwood are flawed narrators because of their lack of emotion and unreliability. The story of the Earnshaw and Linton families is one of drama, heightened emotion and tragedy. However, when Nelly recounts these events "the emotional range displayed... is extremely limited" (Krupat, 1970, p. 274). Nelly seems to have not been greatly affected by the gravity of the events she has witnessed. Lockwood, meanwhile, is simply "an admirer of Nelly's style" (Krupat, 1970, p. 274) and shows a "narrowness of emotional range" (ibid.), demonstrating no change in attitude or understanding from what he has heard from Nelly. Based on this limited emotion, it can be argued that Nelly and Lockwood are unreliable narrators. Their recounting of events demonstrates that they do not understand how the Heathcliff-Catherine couple are operating. There is no alternative story offered by the other characters, leaving Nelly and Lockwood's point of view the only one the reader is given. Nelly's calm, rational recounting of events and Lockwood's full approval of her storytelling makes it difficult for the reader to attempt an alternative reading, or to understand why Catherine and Heathcliff behave the way they do. This untrustworthy narration causes the reader to consider the motivations for these characters, an interest that fits in with modernist concerns.

Aside from their flaws as narrators, Nelly and Lockwood are also flawed as characters. Their role of authority in telling the story allows readers to become aware of their faults. Nelly's ability to tell Lockwood the events she has witnessed comes from her taking part in

and affecting the events that have taken place. Nelly's presence at crucial moments, particularly in Catherine's confession scene when Nelly does not tell Catherine that Heathcliff is listening, is fundamental in creating the action, which has the major consequence of separating the couple and causing the story's tragedy (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 81). James Halfley is critical of how Nelly presents herself in her narrative to Lockwood. To Halfley, Nelly makes sure to:

present herself in the genteel and upright role she fancies; she blames herself for what has happened only at times when she can be sure of his [Lockwood's] sympathizing with her; in the crucial instances she is silent, and we must watch, rather than hear, the role she plays; or in other instances, she manoeuvres herself out of the way by coy references to her youth, her excitement (Halfley, 1958, p. 204)

Nelly is too involved in the events she is recalling, and as such as the ability to control how Lockwood and the reader perceive them. Lockwood, like Nelly, is also flawed because of his belief that he is superior to the events and characters he is hearing of. This attitude distances Lockwood emotionally from the events of the story and as a result, leaves him "unfit to speak properly" of them (Krupat, 1970, p. 279). Because Nelly and Lockwood's role as narrator is compromised by her unreliability and her role in the action of the story, her moral stance on the Heathcliff-Catherine relationship is undermined.

In subverting a realist reading of this behaviour by subverting Nelly and Lockwood's authority and reliability as narrators, Brontë does not offer the reader a clear explanation for Catherine and Heathcliff's actions, nor does she include a moral stance by which to

judge them. As a result, the reader questions and considers the motivations for the actions of Catherine and Heathcliff, a response privileged by modernists.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë presents many of her characters in heightened psychological states, a technique that is present in the work of many modernist writers. Heathcliff is in a constant state of psychological torment throughout the novel, and shows little to no positive emotion throughout the course of his entire life. Instead, he displays a series of violent and cruel actions that represent his abnormal psychology. The characters who witness these behaviours, particularly Nelly, struggle to make sense of them. Heathcliff's victimisation as a child causes him to manifest abnormal behaviours in order to survive and overcome oppression at the hands of Hindley, and prejudice from Edgar Linton, who calls him "a runaway servant" (Brontë, 1847/1995 p. 96). Even in his younger years, Heathcliff relies on violence in order to defend himself against those he perceives to be enemies. When Edgar teases him, Heathcliff responds by grabbing hot liquid and throwing it "full against the speaker's face and neck" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 59). This tendency for violence is a theme that continues throughout Heathcliff's life, and most often, the characters that encounter him do not understand his behaviour or know how to act in response.

Most of Heathcliff's heightened emotions stem from his feelings for Catherine. Emily Brontë suggests that their love is comprised of some very negative elements such as obsession, cruelty, derangement and manipulation. His passion and loyalty to her cause him to immediately run away when he learns Catherine believes they will "be beggars" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 82) and it will "degrade" her if they were to marry (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 81). In spite of knowing that Heathcliff has heard her say these things, Catherine later demands to know how she has treated Heathcliff "inferentially" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 112),

seemingly unaware of how her behaviour has caused Heathcliff to act the way he does. This shows that even Catherine, who believes she is the closest to Heathcliff, does not wonder about his motives. Heathcliff's desire to reunite with Catherine makes him threaten her marriage to Edgar by insisting on seeing Catherine when she is ill. He does this even though he is forbidden from entering Thrushcross Grange and despite the fact that it may put Catherine at greater risk of dying. When Nelly comes close to make sure that Catherine has not died after embracing Heathcliff, he "gnashed... and foamed like a mad dog" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 162). In response, Nelly feels she is not "in the company of a creature of my own species" (ibid.), and cannot fathom the excess of feeling Catherine and Heathcliff are expressing.

Heathcliff's negativity and psychological disturbance increases after Catherine's death, as memories of her push him further into insanity. For Heathcliff, the world is an "abyss" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 169) if Catherine is not present. Heathcliff laments to Nelly towards the end of the story that "the entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 324). The most prominent example of Heathcliff's increased insanity is the conversation between Heathcliff and Nelly immediately after Catherine's death. When Nelly tells Heathcliff of her hopes that Catherine will be in heaven, Heathcliff cries "May she wake in torment! ... Where is she? Not there – not in heaven..." (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 169). This response to Catherine's death exemplifies the combination of intense love and loathing he feels. Even at the end of their relationship, the reader is still unsure of Heathcliff's feelings towards Catherine. This uncertainty is also felt by Nelly, who emphasizes the fact that she is shocked by his behaviour. As Heathcliff hits his head against a tree, Nelly says, "it hardly moved my compassion – it appalled me... - he was beyond my skill to quiet or console" (Brontë,

1847/1995, p. 169). This inability to make sense of his behaviour causes the reader to think more about why Heathcliff reacts to his environment in such a violent, excessive way.

Heathcliff represents an unconventional belief that he and Catherine can only be united in death, which takes a literal form when Heathcliff arranges Catherine's coffin to fulfill his dream of "dissolving with her, and being more happy still" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 289). Again, Nelly does not understand why Heathcliff is doing this, and tells him that he was "very wicked" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 289), later telling Lockwood that she "didn't like to hear him talk" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 291). The decision to comply with Heathcliff's wishes for his burial is carried out "to the scandal of the whole neighbourhood" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 336). This shows that Heathcliff's behaviour, especially during his grieving, is never clearly explained, and as such, is often misunderstood by those around him.

Catherine presents her own type of heightened psychology based on a combination of naiveté and selfishness, again leaving the reader unsure of her motives, and unable to place a moral judgement on her actions. In childhood, Catherine has a tendency for heightened emotions and violence. She is described as "mischievous and wayward" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 38), initially responding to Heathcliff's introduction to the house by "grinning and spitting" at him (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 37). Soon, though, Catherine becomes incredibly emotionally attached to Heathcliff, causing Nelly to believe she is "too fond" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 42) of him, and that the best way to punish Catherine as a child was to "keep her separate" from Heathcliff (ibid.). Although there is already evidence that Catherine has a capability for extreme emotions, her psychology becomes even more irrational as she grows older. When entering adulthood, Catherine becomes more erratic and very contradictory in her speech and actions. In her confession scene to Nelly, Catherine demonstrates vanity and concern for Heathcliff when explaining why she will

accept Edgar Linton's proposal of marriage. As quoted earlier, Catherine is drawn by the promise of wealth and status in becoming a Linton, but also argues that her plan to marry Edgar is also based on her hope that she "can aid Heathcliff to rise" out of his low social status as a stable boy (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 82). Nelly responds to this by telling Catherine that it is "the worst motive you've given yet" (ibid.), causing the reader to question how genuine or truthful this admission is. In spite of her plan to become a Linton, Catherine demonstrates that she will never truly be able to abandon Heathcliff, most famously illustrated when she tells Nelly, "I *am* Heathcliff" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 82). This claim encapsulates the identity crisis, intense passion and obsession that Catherine herself feels for Heathcliff, and her inability to completely adapt to the Lintons' way of life. To Catherine, marrying Edgar poses no problem in her relationship with Heathcliff. Even though Nelly is concerned that when Catherine marries Edgar, Heathcliff will lose "friend, and love, and all" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 81), Catherine responds by saying, "quite deserted! We separated!... who is to separate us, pray?" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 82). Heathcliff's decision to run away, however, and his dialogue with Catherine after his return shows that he does not agree with her beliefs or motives. The conflict of lifestyles causes confusion and uncertainty in Catherine, and as this confusion grows, so does Catherine's tendency to act hysterically and erratically. Although Catherine supposedly forms "a deep and growing happiness" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 93) with Edgar after they marry, this changes drastically once Heathcliff returns. Catherine is again infatuated with Heathcliff, but her "expressions of pleasure in receiving him" (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 100) change suddenly when she realises that Heathcliff is romantically interested in Isabella. Catherine tells Isabella that Heathcliff is "an unreclaimed creature, without refinement" (Brontë,

1847/1995, p. 102) and that he is “a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 103), harsh and cruel accusations that oppose her claim to love Heathcliff.

Catherine’s heightened psychology manifests itself into physical illness, showing how powerful her emotions have become. Although the first illness debilitates her and gives Catherine “an alteration in her constitution” (ibid.), her second illness eventually kills her. During this time, Catherine speaks of her overwhelming need to be part of Heathcliff’s life again, and that the memories of a happier childhood leave her wishing she “was a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free...” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 125). Her contradictions are made obvious again when she meets for the last time with Heathcliff. She accuses Heathcliff and Edgar of breaking her heart, and tells Heathcliff, “you have killed me – and thriven on it, I think” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 160). She says to him “why shouldn’t you suffer – I do! Will you forget me – will you be happy when I am in the earth?” (ibid.). However, she then begs him to come back to her as he walks away, and embraces him. Again, the combination of love and hate is present when Catherine tells Heathcliff “I wish I could hold you... ‘till we were both dead!” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 160). Catherine believes, and convinces Heathcliff, that death is the only way they can be together without the obstacles of money, status or oppression. To Nelly, however, Catherine’s speeches at the end of her life are “ravings” (Brontë, 1847/1995, p. 164) and that “she does not know what she says” (ibid.). The way in which her psychological damage causes her illness and eventual death shows that the strength of her emotions, though often disregarded or misunderstood, are usually presented in an way which prompts the reader to contemplate Catherine’s beliefs and motivations.

A number of reasons can explain the action of Heathcliff and Catherine in the story because of their psychological states. Some explanations that have been put forward by

critics include a drive for economic wealth, the couple's unconventional upbringing and exposure to cruelty and violence, and the different, conflicting perceptions of truth each character holds. However, no one reason is offered by Emily Brontë to explain why Heathcliff and Catherine act in such an irrational, often hysterical manner. These explanations are simply interpretations by critics who wanted to understand the reasons behind the character's erratic behaviour.

Modernist revaluation of *Wuthering Heights*

By 1900, responses to *Wuthering Heights* had changed significantly. Towards the end of the 1800s, the Brontë sisters had developed a cult status among readers (Miller, 2002, p. 101). In 1893, the Brontë Society formed, increasing the profile of the sisters and their work. The creation of the Brontë Society demonstrated how the shock caused by Ellis, Acton and Currer Bell's true identity as females had subsided. The public found the sisters to be fascinating, and encouraged a rise of biographical studies of the Brontës (Miller, 2002, pp. 216-217). Within these biographical studies of the Brontës, scholars became interested in what they had read and what had influenced their works. This interest highlighted the way in which the passing of time made transgressions and interactions between genre no longer so shocking or objectionable. Critics tended to examine these features without the prejudices and expectations of the initial critics who had applied a purely realist reading to their analyses of *Wuthering Heights*. The twentieth-century critics were able to discredit the initial reviews, and accepted *Wuthering Heights* into the literary mainstream.

Critical responses in the twentieth century began with an article by Mrs Humphry Ward, written as an introduction to the 1900 edition of *Wuthering Heights*. Ward's article was

important in drawing a distinction between early reviews and the new group of critics revaluing the novel. Ward described how *Wuthering Heights* had been “Read in haste, and with a prior sense of repulsion, which dropped a veil between book and reader, and was in truth only the result of an all but universal tenor of opinion amongst our elders” (Ward, 1900/1970, p. 103).

Though this comment echoed Charlotte Brontë’s complaints about earlier reviews, Mrs Ward based her argument around the growing interest in literary influences, and less on the requirements of realist, didactic writing. Ward investigated and emphasised the influence of German literature and the Romantic Movement on *Wuthering Heights*, which explained the “love of violent speech and action, the preference for the hideous in character and the abnormal in situation” (Ward, 1900/1970, p. 106). This highlighting of genre justified the darker elements of the story and acknowledged the novel as a mixture of genres, as well as showed Ward’s interest in the psychology of the characters. Ward also rejected Nelly’s role as narrator in the story, claiming that Nelly’s character “does the most treacherous, cruel and indefensible things, simply that the story may move” (1900/1970, p. 109). In reducing Nelly’s authority, Ward is able to find other reasons for the characters’ actions in the story.

Ward identified the difficulty of readers to relate to Heathcliff as deriving from his inability to adhere to the reader’s moral structure – evident in the reviews of the nineteenth-century. Ward highlighted scenes that humanised Heathcliff, such as Catherine and Heathcliff’s childhood together, Catherine’s rejection of Heathcliff for Edgar, and Heathcliff’s revenge on Hindley. Ward believed Heathcliff disintegrates because Catherine haunts him for murdering “her happiness and youth” (Ward, 1900/1970, p. 114), and that he is driven by the belief that he will be reunited with her upon his death. In emphasising these parts of the story, Ward concentrates on the complexity of the characters of *Wuthering Heights*, and

reveals possible explanations for Heathcliff's thought processes and behaviour. Ward claimed Catherine's actions and words bore little relation to true life, but described some events in the book as having "extraordinary poetry" (1900/1970, p. 112), such as when Catherine becomes ill. By understanding *Wuthering Heights* in terms of its literary approach, rather than examining it as adhering or subverting certain writing standards, she did not judge the quality of the story on its morality or message. Her article set the standard of twentieth-century criticism of *Wuthering Heights* by discarding the need for a moral message in writing. Ward's comments point to a growing interest in character psychology and behaviour that allowed her to endorse the story and find ways to account for it.

Lascelles Abercrombie, writing in 1924, called *Wuthering Heights* "one of the greatest not merely of English but of European novels" (Abercrombie, 1924/1970, p. 119). He, like Mrs Humphrey Ward, looked at literary influences and similar authors including Dostoyevsky, Byron and Conrad, to explain the dark themes of the story (Abercrombie, 1924/1970, p. 119). Abercrombie believed Heathcliff represented the extremes of brutality and passion, typical of the gothic hero. He argued that in reading about these extremes of feeling and their interaction, the reader is able to understand "how a man may turn into a fiend" (1924/1970, p. 120). This tied in with the major modernist focus on the human mind and behaviour, as well as aiming to understand the exploration of psychology that Emily Brontë was offering the reader. Abercrombie established the idea that Heathcliff's hate and love are not separate entities, and justified Heathcliff's violent behaviour by arguing the "agonies of that ghostly passion" is his main motive (Abercrombie, 1924/1970, p. 120). For Abercrombie, Emily Brontë's main purpose and greatest achievement is her representation of love. The love in the story "consumes alike sentiment and sensuality, to which the mortal things in life are mere irrelevance, which belongs to the inward essence..."

(1924/1970, p. 121). Abercrombie's stance on exploring the characters of the novel shows his belief that the "inward essence", the character's psychology, are more real than the externalities, which are irrelevant. Abercrombie's reading argued that the Heathcliff-Catherine couple showed the way pure love becomes twisted and destructive, again asserting the idea that *Wuthering Heights* was based on the consequences of repression. This article shows a strong interest in making sense of the characters and understanding the motivations for their actions.

Virginia Woolf applied her modernist outlook to a reading of *Wuthering Heights* in her article published in 1925. Woolf looked for the modernist elements in the novel, saying that Emily Brontë had not been urged to create by "her own suffering or her own injuries" (Woolf, 1925/1970, p. 122), but rather, Emily had "looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within her power to untie it in a book" (ibid.). The "suggestion of power underlying the apparitions of human nature" (ibid.) gives the novel greatness, because it shows the depth and complexity of character and their strength of feeling. Woolf's use of the term "apparitions" would suggest that Woolf believed explorations of humanity could not provide a definitive representation of human nature in fiction. However, the qualities attributed to characters gave writers the opportunity to explore different psychologies and make sense of them individually. In doing this, the writing in *Wuthering Heights* supported Woolf's modernist appreciation for the more realistic, genuine representation of human nature because it offered exploration and understanding of consciousness. This article, though brief, represents a major shift in genre trends and responses to writing. Woolf, as a modernist, found value and positive aspects in the gothic elements of *Wuthering Heights*, unlike the early critics who favoured realism.

E.M. Forster's 1927 analysis, "Prophecy", argued that *Wuthering Heights* is comprised of little beyond the Heathcliff-Catherine relationship, and his article represents a growing interest in the unconventional love story they presented. Forster believed the couple are unique because their emotions operate in a different way to other characters, writing "instead of inhabiting the characters, they surround them like thunder clouds, and generate the explosions that fill the novel..." (Forster, 1927/1970, p. 133). This description implies that the gothic, exaggerated, passionate emotions of the characters make their relationship distinctive, and demonstrated Forster's interest in the consciousness of the characters. This response to what was originally seen as abnormal and repulsive shows that now the unique features of the story can be seen as attractive. Forster writes that upon finishing the novel, "One cannot afterwards remember anything in it but Heathcliff and the elder Catherine" (ibid.). Forster, in his interest in the deranged, abnormal, dangerous love story, sentimentalised the Catherine-Heathcliff couple by emphasising the passion and avoiding examination of the more cruel and hurtful actions of the pair. In doing this, Forster showed that reviewers were no longer so interested in the moral implications of the relationship the couple presented, and were less interested in the moral or didactic issues the novel presented.

Twentieth-century critics were more open to an endorsement of the Heathcliff-Catherine couple and were able to put forward a plethora of new readings. New themes and interpretations applied to the critical dialogue of *Wuthering Heights* attempted to make sense of the subversive, gothic elements of the story and explain the unconventional behaviour of the Heathcliff-Catherine couple, rather than simply reject it outright.

In 1934, David Cecil wrote that he believed *Wuthering Heights* was constructed as moving from harmony, through destruction, to resolution. His article worked to explain the

psychology of all the characters in the story in order to account for their behaviour. Cecil placed the characters into two groups – the Earnshaws are “storm” and the Lintons are “calm” (Cecil, 1934/1970, p. 137). Because Heathcliff, like Catherine, is “a child of the storm” (ibid.), the pair fall in love, but Heathcliff creates conflict amongst the other characters. This description highlights the psychology Catherine and Heathcliff presents that differs from the other characters in the novel. Cecil described Catherine’s decision to marry Edgar as a result of her being “seduced into uniting herself in an ‘unnatural’ marriage” (Cecil, 1934/1970, p. 138), making Heathcliff react destructively, avenging Hindley and creating another unnatural union with Isabella. To re-establish harmony, Heathcliff must stop his destructive behaviour and reunite with Catherine, even if only in death. Cecil’s reading of the couple is an investigation into what motivates Heathcliff and Catherine, and what finally causes Heathcliff to give up. This examination of characters allows an inclusion of both the loving and destructive elements of their personalities and actions, without a reading of the moral implications. It also shows the focus on psychology that reviewers had developed, allowing them to come up with new ways of interpreting the novel.

“The Theme and Structure of *Wuthering Heights*”, written by Melvin Watson in 1949, also contained arguments that demonstrated the shift away from the expectations of early critics. Watson argued that Heathcliff was the driving force of the novel, and his journey the story’s central theme, writing “he not only acts and suffers, but causes others to act and suffer; his strength permeates the story...” (Watson, 1949, p. 89). Based on this, Watson believes that *Wuthering Heights* is “a psychological study of an elemental man whose soul is torn between love and hate” (ibid.). Instead of basing his reading on ideas of morality or didacticism, Watson highlighted the psychological torment of Heathcliff’s character and the

way in which his psychology and behaviour move the story forward. In taking this approach, Watson dedicates his article to conducting a psychological study of Heathcliff's character and attempts to find the specific reasons that motivate Heathcliff's actions. Realising Catherine has been tempted by wealth and beauty, Heathcliff decides "if love alone is insufficient to hold Cathy, he will secure the necessary money and polish" (Watson, 1949, p. 91). According to Watson, for Heathcliff, "union with Cathy is his one desire", (ibid.) and when she dies, the union transforms from physical to spiritual. Watson also tries to explain Catherine's psychology to make sense of her behaviour. Watson believed Catherine's marriage to Edgar is motivated by economic and social factors, and that Catherine loves Heathcliff and Edgar, albeit in different ways. The problem lies in Catherine's naiveté, that she "failed to think her decisions through... she assumes that she can continue to rule both Edgar and Heathcliff" (Watson, 1949, pp. 93-94). Watson's article marks a complete shift from the original response of initial reviewers in the 1800s. Critics no longer privileged or rejected characters and instead attempted to explain or justify their behaviour through a psychological exploration.

The modernist group of critics, ending with Watson, offered a completely different analysis of *Wuthering Heights* to those reviewers who had initially judged it. This is due to the modernist movement that privileged the exploration of consciousness, an approach obviously present in Emily Brontë's novel. The modernist framework allowed people to see how Brontë explored darker psychological states, animalistic behaviour, and the dark, abnormal state of love between Heathcliff and Catherine. In recognising these elements, reviewers were also no longer so interested in the moral message of the story or for a clear explanation about character's motivations from the author. Brontë's psychological exploration of the characters, while suspending the novel's moral framework by

discrediting Nelly and Lockwood's authority as narrators, consequently allowed reviewers to favour the story.

Conclusion

My thesis has demonstrated that the value of a text is never fixed. It is always possible for the popularity or favourability of work to change. As a result, formerly unpopular texts can become more favoured, while previously favourable texts can fade into obscurity. This is evident in the history of responses to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Although at first reviewers and critics rejected *Wuthering Heights*, now the novel is believed to be a classic work of British literature.

I have demonstrated that this unstable value of literature is a result of the influence of changing literary trends and social attitudes. Because social attitudes themselves are in a constant state of flux, so too are the literary trends that develop from them, and the works of literature that are created as a result. Reviewers and critics, who represented the social attitudes and trends that form the basis of valuing literature, reveal the changing response to and literary value of *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë's influence and use of elements from the gothic genre, an unpopular mode of writing, and the altering of popular realist ideals, led to its initial rejection. Later, the aspects of writing that were similar to modernist works caused it to become favourable as the modernist movement grew.

At the time of publication, reviewers focused on the gothic features of *Wuthering Heights* that they found to be objectionable. Reviewers struggled to privilege the novel's focus on emotions and psychology, and found it difficult to respond to uncertain morals of the characters. Reviewers predominantly rejected the construction of the characters of *Wuthering Heights* because of their excessive emotion and morally questionable behaviour. Later critics, however, did not reject these features of *Wuthering Heights*. Their modernist influences meant that they favoured the focus on psychology, because it offered an

opportunity to provide various explanations for the behaviour of characters. They also privileged the lack of didacticism, opening up a wider interpretation to be made about the novel. For reviewers influenced by modernism, the high emotions of the characters and uncertain moral code allowed them to explore thought processes and different responses to chaotic situations. The later reviewers were particularly drawn to Catherine and Heathcliff because of their conflicting, dysfunctional relationship and the unclear motivations for their behaviour.

Through this investigation into the changing literary standards that have influenced a transformation of responses to *Wuthering Heights* in the past, further issues have arisen concerning the present popularity of the novel as well as the recent opinions expressed by critics in response to the mainstream success of the story. I am interested in exploring the revival in popularity of gothic works, in particular the current popular status of *Wuthering Heights*. The novel is enjoying a renewed popularity, mainly due to its rebranding as a similar story to Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series. Meyer's novels and *Wuthering Heights* share common themes of tortured characters and a dysfunctional love story, and *Wuthering Heights* has recently been republished with a cover design similar to Meyer's books, and is labelled with a sticker reading "Bella and Edward's favourite book", the two main characters of the series. There has also been a continuous interest in adapting the story to screen, with another adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* set to be released in 2011. Interestingly, many of these adaptations choose to focus on the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship so closely that their children are often not included in the script. In doing this, the main gothic feature of the story, Catherine and Heathcliff and their romance, is made the sole focus of the adaptations. As a result, the realist elements that are present before and after the relationship are increasingly being ignored.

Although the novel seems to be currently enjoying mainstream success, there is also evidence that critically, the novel is undergoing renewed analysis. The cause for this criticism appears to be a rebellion against the popularising of *Wuthering Heights*, which emphasises the surface gothic elements of the story, without the psychological exploration that encourages questions about character motivation. Critics have also found fault with the sentimentalism and conventionalising of the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship. In reaction to this, critics feel the need to emphasise the complexity of the love story, and the psychological elements present in the story. In 1997, Marianne Thormahlen wrote her analysis of *Wuthering Heights* in which she argues against the popular concept that the Heathcliff-Catherine relationship was “*the grand romantic passion of English fiction*” (Thormahlen, p. 183). Thormahlen’s article asserts that Catherine suffers from psychotic behaviour and that Heathcliff’s missing three years can be explained by “supernatural intervention” (Thormahlen, p. 191). In doing this, Thormahlen emphasised the elements of discord and psychological instability that define the couple.

Like Thormahlen, Graeme Tytler has argued that even though popular culture acknowledges the tragedy of the Heathcliff-Catherine relationship, the overall sentiment towards them is “fundamentally affirmative” (Tytler, p. 167). Tytler’s article emphasised the couple’s psychological illness with the instances of unstable behaviour in the novel.

Although Thormahlen and Tytler continue with the modernist focus on psychology, they are motivated by the popular over-simplification of the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship that presents them as a conventional, though tragic, couple. This recent critical response to *Wuthering Heights* is again an example of how attitudes to the text continue to be influenced by changing social attitudes and literary trends.

These two recent articles show a renewed focus on the Catherine-Heathcliff couple. These articles, and the parallels between *Wuthering Heights* and the *Twilight* series also demonstrate a renewed interest in gothic, psychologically unstable couples, with an emphasis on erratic behaviour and uncertain motives. This popularity in tortured love raises questions as to why this representation of romance is privileged and what it says about our understanding of relationships. It also raises questions about how this is reflective of current social attitudes and literary trends. In looking at the shifts in historical and contemporary literary standards and systems of value, as this thesis has done, it may be possible to find answers to these questions.

This thesis has argued that, over time, *Wuthering Heights* has been subject to a series of changing responses from reviewers and critics. The shifting popularity of literary trends and social attitudes explains this shift in responses, and these trends affect the way different groups at different times perceive texts. This demonstrates how a text has the potential to be received in different ways, in reaction to, as well as being indicative of, the social attitudes and trends that are influential during a particular time and within a particular set of social conditions.

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